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A

SERMON

Concerning the

Unity of the Divine Nature,

AND THE

B. TRINITY, &c.

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1693



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I T I M. II. 5.

*For there is one God.*

**T**H E Particle *for* leads us to the consideration of the Context and Occasion of these words, which in short is this. The design of this *Epistle* is to direct *Timothy*, to whom *St. Paul* had committed the Government of the Church of *Ephesus*, how he ought to demean himself.

self in that great and weighty Charge. And at the beginning of this *Chapter* he gives direction concerning *Publick Prayers* in the Church; that *Prayers* and *Thanksgiving* be made for all men, and for all Ranks and Orders of men; especially for *Kings* and all that are in *Authority*, that under them *Christians* might lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty.

And this he tells us was very suitable to the *Christian Religion*, by which God designed the Salvation of Mankind; and therefore it must needs be very acceptable to him that we should offer up *Prayers* and *Thanksgivings* to him in behalf of all men: For this, saith the *Apostle*, is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour, who will have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the Truth.

And

And then it follows in the next words, *For there is one God, and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave himself a Ransome for all*: As if he had said, this universal Charity of *Christians*, in praying for all men, must needs be very acceptable to *Him* to whom we put up our Prayers, *God the Father*, who sent his *Son* for the Salvation of all men: And to *Him* likewise by whom we offer up our Prayers to God, and is among us *Christians* the only Mediator between God and Men, in virtue of that Price and Ransome which he paid for the Redemption of all Mankind, I say, for this reason it must needs be very acceptable to Him that we should pray for all men, because he dyed for all men, and now that He is in Heaven at the right hand of God intercedes with him for the Salvation of those for whom he dyed: *There*

*is One God, and one Mediator between God and Men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave himself a Ransome for all.*

Which words, though they be brought in to prove more immediately that it is *acceptable to God our Saviour*, that we should put up Prayers to Him *for all men*, because he desires the Salvation of all men, and hath sent his Son to purchase the Salvation of all men, by the Sacrifice of himself; and in virtue of that Sacrifice to be the only *Mediator* between God and us: I say, though this be the immediate scope and design of these words, yet they are likewise a direction to us, unto whom we ought to address our Prayers, namely, to *God*; and by whose *mediation* and intercession we ought to put up our Prayers to God the *Father*, namely, by his Son *Jesus Christ*, who is constituted the only *Mediator between God and Men*.

There

There are several *Propositions* contained in this and the following *verse*; but I shall at present confine my self to the *first*, namely, That *there is One God*, that is, *but One*, as *St. Paul* 1 Cor. 8. elsewhere expresseth it, *There is none* 4. *other God but One*. And *Moses* lays this as the *Foundation* of the *Natural Law*, as well as of the *Jewish Religion*, *The Lord he is One God*, and Deut. 4. *there is none besides him*, that is, be- 35. *sides Jehovah*, whom the *People of Israel* did worship as the only true God. And this the *Prophet Isaiah* perpetually declares in opposition to the *Polytheism* and variety of Gods among the *Heathen*. *I am the first*, Ifai. 44. *and I am the last*, and *besides me there is* 6. *no God*. And again, *Is there any God* v. 8. *besides me? there is no God*, I know not any: He, who hath an infinite knowledge and knows all things, knows no other God. And our *B. Saviour* makes this the *Fundamental*

*Article of all Religion, and the knowledge of it necessary to every man's Salvation; This, says He, is life eternal, to know thee the only true God.*

The *Unity of the Divine Nature* is a *Notion* wherein the greatest and the wisest part of Mankind did always agree, and therefore may reasonably be presumed to be either *natural*, or to have sprung from some *Original Tradition* delivered down to us from the *first Parents* of Mankind: I mean, that there is *One Supreme Being*, the *Author and Cause* of all things, whom the most ancient of the *Heathen Poets* commonly called the *Father of Gods and men*. And thus *Aristotle* in his *Metaphysicks* defines God, the *eternal and most excellent, or best of all Living Beings*. And this *Notion*, of *One Supreme being*, agrees very well with that exact *Harmony* which appears in the *Frame and Go-*

Government of the World, in which we see all things conspiring to one End, and continuing in one uniform Order and Course ; which cannot reasonably be ascribed to any other but a constant and uniform Cause ; and which to a considering man does plainly shew that all things are made and governed by that *One* powerful *Principle*, and great and wise *Mind* which we call *God*.

But although the generality of Mankind had a *Notion* of *One Supreme God*, yet the *Idolatry* of the *Heathen* plainly shews that this *Notion*, in process of Time, was greatly degenerated, and corrupted into an apprehension of a *Plurality* of *Gods* ; though in reason it is evident enough, that there can be no more Gods than *One* ; and that *One*, who is of infinite Perfection, is as sufficient to all purposes whatsoever,  
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as ten thousand Deities, if they were possible, could possibly be; as I shall shew in the following Discourse.

Now this multitude of *Deities*, which the fond Superstition and vain Imagination of Men had formed to themselves, were by the *Wiser* sort, who being forced to comply with the Follies of the People endeavoured to make the best of them, supposed to be either *Parts* of the *Universe* which the *Egyptians*, as *Plutarch* tells us, thought to be the same with *God*; but then the more considerable *Parts* of the *Universe* they parcelled out into several *Deities*; and as the *Ocean* hath several *Names*, according to the several *Coasts* and *Countries* by which it passeth; so they gave several *Names* to this *One Deity* according to the several *Parts* of the *World* which several *Nations* made the *Objects* of their *Worship*. Or

Or else, they adored the several Perfections and Powers of the *One Supreme God* under several Names and Titles, with regard to the various Blessings and Benefits which they thought they received from *Him*.

Thus the *Indian Philosophers*, the *Brachmans*, are said to have worshipped the *Sun* as the *Supreme Deity*; and he certainly is the most *Worshipful* of all sensible Beings, and bids fairest for a *Deity*; especially if he was, as they supposed, animated by a *Spirit* endued with knowledg and understanding. And if a man, who had been bred in a dark Cave, should all on the sudden be brought out at Noon-day to behold this visible World; after he had viewed and consider'd it awhile, he would in all probability pitch upon the *Sun* as the most likely, of all the things he had seen, to be a *Deity*. For if such a man had any Notion of a  
God,

God, and were to chuse one upon sight, he would without dispute fix upon the *Sun*, and fall down before Him and worship Him.

And *Macrobius* manageth this as his main *Plea* for the *Idolatry* of the *Heathen*; that under all the several *Names* of their *Gods* they *Worshiped* the *Sun*: And this diversity of *Names* was but a more distinct conception and acknowledgment of the many *Blessings* and *advantages* which mankind received from Him, and a more particular and express *Adoration* of the several *Powers* and *Perfections* which were in *Him*. And this was the very best defence, and all the tolerable sense which the *Wiseſt* among the *Heathen* could make of the *multitude* of their *Deities*.

And yet whilst they generally owned *One Supreme Being* that was the *Principle* and *Original* of all things,

things, they worshipped several *subordinate Deities* as really distinct from one another. Some of these they fancied to be *superior* to the rest and to have their residence in *Heaven*; by which *Marsilius Ficinus* supposes *Plato* to mean no more but the *Chief* of the *Angels*. These were called *Jedi*, *Dij Superi* and *Dij Caelestes*, *superior* and *heavenly Gods*: The *Scripture* terms them the *Host of Heaven*, meaning the *Sun*, *Moon* and *Stars*, which they supposed to be animated, or at least to be inhabited by *Angels*, or glorious *Spirits*, whom they called *Gods*.

Other of their *Deities* were accounted much *inferior* to these, being supposed to be the *Souls* of their deceased *Heroes*; who for their great and worthy *Deeds*, when they lived upon *Earth*, were supposed after *Death* to be translated into the number of their *Gods*. And these  
were

were called *Semidei* and *Deastri*, that is, *half Gods* and a *sort of Gods*: And as the other were *Celestial*, so these were *Δαίμονες ἑταίχοι* a kind of *Terrestrial Spirits* that were *Presidents* and *Procurators* of *Human* affairs here below, that is, a middle sort of *Divine Powers* that were *Mediators* and *Agents* between *God* and *Men*, and did carry the *Prayers* and *Supplications* of *Men* to *God*, and bring down the *Commands* and *Blessings* of *God* to *Men*.

But in the midst of all this *Crowd* and *confusion* of *Deities*, and the various *Superstitions* about them, the *Wiser Heathen*, as *Thales*, *Pythagoras*, *Socrates*, *Plato*, *Aristotle*, *Tully*, *Plutarch* and others, preserved a true *Notion* of *One Supreme God*, whom they defined an *infinite Spirit*, pure from all *Matter* and free from all *imperfection*: And all the variety of their *Worship* was, as they pretended in

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excuse of it, but a more particular owning of the various representations of the *Divine* Power and Excellencies which manifested themselves in the World, and of the several communications of Blessings and Favours by *them* imparted to Men : And *Tertullian* observes, that even when *Idolatry* had very much obscured the Glory of the *Sovereign Deity*, yet the greater part of Mankind did still in their common *Forms of Speech* appropriate the Name of God in a more especial and peculiar manner to *One*, saying, *If God grant, If God please*, and the like.

*Adversus Marcionem*, l. i. c. 10.

So that there is sufficient ground to believe that the *Unity* of the *Divine Nature*, or the Notion of *One Supreme God*, Creator and Governor of the World, was the Primitive and general belief of Mankind : And that *Polytheism* and *Idolatry* were a corruption and degeneracy from the

the *Original Notion* which Mankind had concerning *God*; as the *Scripture-History* doth declare and testify.

And this account which I have given of the *Heathen Idolatry* doth by no means excuse it. For whatever may be said by way of extenuation in behalf of some few of the wiser and more devout among them, the generality were grossly guilty both of believing *more Gods*, and of worshipping *false Gods*.

And this must needs be a very great Crime, since the *Scripture* every where declares *God* to be particularly *jealous* in this Case, and that *he will not give his glory to another, nor his praise to graven Images*. Nay, we may not so much as make use of sensible Images to put us in mind of *God*, lest devout Ignorance, seeing the Worship which Wise men paid towards an *Idol*, should be drawn to terminate their Worship there, as  
being

being the very *Deity* it self; which was certainly the Case of the greatest part of the *Heathen* World.

And surely those *Christians* are in no less danger of *Idolatry*, who pay a Veneration to *Images* by kneeling down and praying before them; and in this they are much more inexcusable, because they offend against a much clearer Light; and yet when they go about to justify this Practice are able to bring no other nor better *Pleas* for themselves than the *Heathen* did for their worshipping of *Images*, and for praying to their *inferior Deities*, whom they looked upon as *Mediators* between the *Gods* in Heaven and *Men* upon Earth.

There is but one *Objection*, that I know of, against the general Consent of Mankind concerning the *Unity of God*; and it is this, That there was an ancient Doctrine of some of the most ancient Nations,

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that

that there were *two First Causes* or *Principles* of all things; the *one* the Cause of all *Good*, and the *other* of all the *Evil* that is in the *World*: The reason whereof seems to have been, that they could not apprehend how things of so contrary a nature, as *Good* and *Evil*, could proceed from *one* and the same *Cause*.

And these *two Principles* in several Nations were called by several Names. *Plutarch* says that among the *Greeks* the *Good Principle* was called *God*, and the *Evil Principle* *Δαίμων* or the *Devil*. In conformity to which ancient *Tradition* the *Manichees*, a *Sect* which called themselves *Christians*, did advance *two Principles*, the *one* infinitely *Good*, which they supposed to be the *Original Cause* of all the *good* which is in the *World*; the *other* infinitely *Evil*, to which they ascribed all the *evils* that are in the *World*.

But

But all this is very plainly a corruption of a much more ancient *Tradition* concerning that *old Serpent* the Devil, the Head of the *fallen Angels*, who by tempting our *First Parents* to transgress a positive and express Law of God brought Sin first into the World and all the *Evils* consequent upon it ; of which the *Scripture* gives us a most express and particular account.

And as to the *Notion* of a *Being infinitely Evil*, into which this *Tradition* was corrupted, after *Idolatry* had prevailed in the World, besides that it is a Contradiction, it would likewise be to no purpose to assert *two* opposite Principles of infinite, that is of equal force and Power, for *two Infinites* must of necessity be equal to one another ; because nothing can be more or greater than infinite, and therefore if *two* infinite Beings were possible they would certainly

be equal, and could not be otherwise.

Now that the Notion of a *Principle infinitely Evil* is a Contradiction will be very plain, if we consider that what is *infinitely Evil* must in strict Reasoning, and by necessary consequence, be infinitely imperfect; and therefore infinitely weak, and for that reason, though never so malicious and mischievous, yet being infinitely weak and foolish, could never be in a capacity either to contrive mischief or to execute it.

But if it should be admitted that a Being infinitely mischievous could be infinitely knowing and powerful, yet it could effect no Evil; because the opposite *Principle of infinite Goodness*, being also infinitely Wise and Powerful, they would tie up one anothers hands. So that upon this supposition the *Notion of a Deity* must

must signify just nothing, because by virtue of the eternal opposition and equal conflict of these *two Principles* they would keep one another at a perpetual *Baye* ; and being just an equal Match to one another, the *one* having as much mind and power to do *good* as the *other* to do *evil*, instead of being *two Deities* they would be but *two Idols*, able to do neither *good* nor *evil*.

And having, I hope, now sufficiently cleared this *Objection*, I shall proceed to shew how agreeable this *Principle*, that *there is but one God*, is to the common Reason of Mankind, and to the clearest and most essential Notions which we have of God: And this will appear these *two* ways.

*First*, by considering the most essential *Perfections* of the Divine Nature.

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*Secondly,*

*Secondly*, from the repugnancy and impossibility, the great absurdity and inconvenience of supposing more Gods than One.

*first*, by considering the most essential *Perfections* of the Divine Nature. *Absolute Perfection* which we ascribe to God, as the most essential Notion which Mankind hath always had concerning Him, does necessarily suppose *Unity*; because this is *essential* to the Notion of a Being that is *absolutely perfect*, that all Perfection meets and is united in such a Being: But to imagine more Gods, and some Perfections to be in one and some in another, does destroy the most *essential* Notion which men have of God, namely, that *He* is a Being *absolutely Perfect*, that is, as perfect as is possible: Now to suppose some Perfections in one God which are not in another, is to suppose some possible

ble Perfection to be wanting in God, which is a Contradiction to the most natural and the most easie Notion which all men have of God, that He is a Being in whom all Perfections do meet and are united: But if we suppose more Gods, each of which hath all Perfections united in Him, then all but One would be superfluous and needless; and therefore by just and necessary consequence not only *may*, but of necessity *must* be supposed not to be; since *necessary existence is essential to the Deity*; and therefore if *but One God* be necessary, there can be no more.

Secondly, from the *repugnancy and impossibility*, the great *absurdity and inconvenience* of the contrary. For suppose there were more Gods, *two* for example; and if there may be *two* there may be a *Million*, for we can stop no where: I say, suppose

*two Gods* ; either these *two* would be in all Perfections equal and alike, or unequal and unlike : If equal and alike in all things then, as I said before, one of them would be needless and superfluous, and if *one* why not as well the *other* ? they being supposed to be in all things perfectly alike ; and then there would be no necessity at all of the being of a God ; and yet it is granted on all hands that *necessary existence* is essential to the Notion of a *God* : But if they be unequal, that is, *one* of them inferior to and less perfect than the *other*, that which is inferior and less perfect could not be God, because he would not have all perfection. So that which way soever we turn the thing and look upon it, the Notion of more Gods than One is by its own repugnancy and self-contradiction destructive of it self.

Before

Before I come to apply this *Doctrine* of the *Unity of God*, I must not pass by a very considerable *Difficulty*, which will most certainly arise in every mans mind, without taking particular notice of it, and endeavouring to remove it, if I can. And it is the *Doctrine* of the *B. Trinity*, or of *three real Differences* or *distinct Persons* in *One* and the same *Divine Nature*.

And though this be not a *Difficulty* peculiar only to the *Christian Religion*, as by the generality of those who urge this *Objection* against *Christians* hath been inconsiderately thought; for it is certain, that long before *Christianity* appeared in the world, there was a very ancient *Tradition*, both among *Jews* and *Heathen*, concerning *three real Differences* or *Distinctions* in the *Divine Nature*, very nearly resembling the *Christian Doctrine* of the *Trinity*, as I shall

shall have occasion more fully to shew by and by: Yet it cannot be denied, but that this *Difficulty* doth in a more especial manner affect the *Christian Religion*; the generality of *Christians*, who do most firmly believe the *Trinity*, believing likewise at the same time, more stedfastly if it be possible, *that there is but One God.*

1 Cor. 8.  
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*To us, saith St. Paul, that is, to us Christians, there is but One God. But how can this possibly consist with the common Doctrine of Christians concerning the Trinity, God the Father, Son, and H. Ghost, to each of whom they Attribute, as they verily believe the Scripture does, the most incommunicable Properties and Perfections of the Divine Nature? And what is this less in effect than to say, That there are three Gods?*

For the clearing of this *Difficulty* I shall, with all the brevity I can, offer these following *Considerations*; which  
I hope,

I hope, to an impartial and unprejudiced Judgment, will be sufficient to remove it, or at least to break the main force and strength of it.

I. I desire it may be well considered, that there is a wide difference between the nice *Speculations* of the *Schools*, beyond what is revealed in *Scripture*, concerning the Doctrine of the *Trinity*, and what the *Scripture* only teaches and asserts concerning this *Mystery*. For it is not to be denied but that the *Schoolmen*, who abounded in wit and leisure, though very few among them had either exact skill in the *H. Scriptures*, or in *Ecclesiastical Antiquity* and the *Writings* of the *ancient Fathers* of the *Christian Church*: I say, it cannot be denied but that these *Speculative* and very acute men, who wrought a great part of their *Divinity* out of their own *Brains* as *Spiders* do *Cobwebs* I.

*webs* out of their own bowels, have started a thousand *subtleties* about this *Mystery*, such as no *Christian* is bound to trouble his head withal; much less is it necessary for him to understand those *niceties* which we may reasonably presume that they who talk of them did themselves never thoroughly understand; and least of all is it necessary to believe them. The modesty of *Christians* is contented in *Divine Mysteries* to know what God hath thought fit to reveal concerning them, and hath no curiosity to be *wise above that which is written*. It is enough to believe what God says concerning these matters; and if any man will venture to say more, every other man surely is at his liberty to believe as he sees reason.

II. II. I desire it may in the next place be considered, that the Doctrine

ctrine of the *Trinity*, even as it is asserted in *Scripture*, is acknowledged by us to be still a great *Mystery*, and so imperfectly revealed as to be in a great measure incomprehensible by Human Reason. And therefore though some learned and judicious Men may have very commendably attempted a more particular explication of this great *Mystery* by the strength of *Reason*, yet I dare not pretend to that, knowing both the difficulty and danger of such an Attempt, and mine own insufficiency for it.

All that I ever designed upon this Argument was to make out the credibility of the thing from the Authority of the *H. Scriptures*, without descending to a more particular explication of it than the *Scripture* hath given us; lest by endeavouring to lay the *Difficulties* which are already started about it new ones should

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should be raised, and such as may perhaps be much harder to be removed than those which we have now to grapple withal. And this I hope I have in some measure done in one of the former *Discourses*. Nor indeed do I see that it is any ways necessary to do more; it being sufficient that God hath declared what he thought fit in this matter, and that we do firmly believe what he says concerning it to be true, though we do not perfectly comprehend the meaning of all that he hath said about it.

For in this and the like Cases I take an *implicite Faith* to be very commendable, that is, to believe whatever we are sufficiently assured God hath revealed, though we do not fully understand his meaning in such a Revelation. And thus every man who believes the *H. Scriptures* to be a truly *Divine Revelation* does *implicately*

explicitly believe a great part of the *Prophetical Books of Scripture* and several obscure expressions in those Books, though he do not particularly understand the meaning of all the Predictions and expressions contained in them. In like manner, there are certainly a great many very good *Christians* who do not believe and comprehend the Mysteries of Faith nicely enough to approve themselves to a *Scholastical* and *Magisterial Judge of Controversies*, who yet if they do heartily embrace the *Doctrines* which are clearly revealed in *Scripture* and live up to the plain *Precepts* of the *Christian Religion*, will I doubt not be very well approved by the Great and Just, and by the *infallibly Infallible Judge* of the World.

III. Let it be further considered, III.  
That though neither the word *Tri-*  
*nity*

nity, nor perhaps *Person*, in the sense in which it is used by *Divines* when they treat of this *Mystery*, be any where to be met with in *Scripture*; yet it cannot be denied but that *Three* are there spoken of by the Names of *Father*, *Son*, and *H. Ghost*, in whose Name every *Christian* is baptized, and to each of whom the highest *Titles* and *Properties* of *God* are in *Scripture* attributed: And these *Three* are spoken of with as much distinction from one another as we use to speak of *three* several Persons.

So that though the word *Trinity* be not found in *Scripture*, yet these *Three* are there expressly and frequently mentioned; and a *Trinity* is nothing but *three* of any thing. And so likewise though the word *Person* be not there expressly applied to *Father*, *Son*, and *H. Ghost*; yet it will be very hard to find a more convenient word whereby to express the distinction

stinction of these *Three*. For which reason I could never yet see any just cause to quarrel at this *term*. For since the *H. Spirit* of God in *Scripture* hath thought fit in speaking of these *Three* to distinguish them from one another, as we use in common speech to distinguish *three* several *Persons*, I cannot see any reason why, in the explication of this *Mystery* which purely depends upon *Divine Revelation*, we should not speak of it in the same manner as the *Scripture* doth : And though the word *Person* is now become a *Term of Art*, I see no cause why we should decline it, so long as we mean by it neither more nor less than what the *Scripture* says in other Words.

IV. It deserves further to be considered, That there hath been a very ancient Tradition concerning three

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real *Differences* or *Distinctions* in the *Divine Nature*; and these, as I said before, very nearly resembling the *Christian Doctrine* of the *Trinity*.

Whence this *Tradition* had its original is not easie upon good and certain grounds to say; but certain it is that the *Jews* anciently had this *Notion*: And that they did distinguish the *Word of God*, and the *H. Spirit of God*, from *Him* who was absolutely called *God*, and whom they looked upon as the *First Principle* of all things; as is plain from *Philo Judæus*, and *Moses Nachmanides*, and others cited by the Learned *Grotius* in his incomparable *Book of the Truth of the Christian Religion*.

L. 5.

And among the *Heathen*, *Plato*; who probably enough might have this *Notion* from the *Jews*, did make three *Distinctions* in the *Deity* by the Names of *essential Goodness*, and *Mind*, and *Spirit*.

So

So that whatever Objections this matter may be liable to, it is not so peculiar a *Doctrine* of the *Christian Religion* as many have imagined, though it is revealed by it with much more clearness and certainty : And consequently, neither the *Jews* nor *Plato* have any reason to object it to us *Christians* ; especially since they pretend no other ground for it but either their own *Reason*, or an *ancient Tradition* from their *Fathers* : whereas we *Christians* do appeal to express *Divine Revelation* for what we believe in this matter, and do believe it singly upon that account.

V. It is besides very considerable, That the *Scriptures*, do deliver this *Doctrine* of the *Trinity* without any manner of doubt or question concerning the *Unity* of the *Divine Nature* : And not only so, but do most stedfastly and constantly assert

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that there is but *One God* : And in those very *Texts* , in which these *three Differences* are mentioned, the *Unity* of the *Divine Nature* is expressly asserted ; as where *St. John* makes mention of the *Father* , the *Word* , and the *Spirit* , the *Unity* of these *Three* is likewise affirmed, *There are Three that bear record in Heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Spirit ; and these Three are One.*

VI. VI. It is yet further considerable, That from this *Mystery*, as delivered in *Scripture*, a *Plurality* of *God's* cannot be inferred without making the *Scripture* grossly to contradict it self ; which I charitably suppose the *Socinians* would be as loth to admit as we our selves are. And if either *Councils* , or *Fathers* , or *Schoolmen* , have so explained this *Mystery* as to give any just ground, or so much as a plausible colour for such an Inference,

rence, let the blame fall where it is due, and let it not be charged on the *H. Scriptures*; but rather, as the *Apostle* says in another Case, *Let God be true, and every Man a liar.*

VIIthly and Lastly, I desire it may be considered, That it is not repugnant to Reason to believe some things which are incomprehensible by our Reason; provided that we have sufficient ground and reason for the belief of them: Especially if they be concerning *God*, who is in his Nature *Incomprehensible*; and we be well assured that he hath revealed them. And therefore it ought not to offend us that these *Differences* in the *Deity* are *incomprehensible* by our finite understandings; because the *Divine Nature* it self is so, and yet the belief of *that* is the Foundation of all Religion. VII.

There are a great many things in *Nature* which we cannot comprehend how they either are, or can be: As the *Continuity of Matter*, that is, how the parts of it do hang so fast together that they are many times very hard to be parted; and yet we are sure that it is so, because we see it every day. So likewise how the small *Seeds* of things contain the whole *Form* and *Nature* of the things from which they proceed and into which by degrees they grow; and yet we plainly see this every year.

There are many things likewise in our *Selves*, which no man is able in any measure to comprehend, as to the manner how they are done and performed: As the *vital union* of *Soul* and *Body*: Who can imagine by what device or means a *Spirit* comes to be so closely united and so firmly link'd to a *material Body*, that they

they are not to be parted without great force and violence offer'd to Nature? The like may be said of the operations of our several *Faculties* of *Sense* and *Imagination*, of *Memory* and *Reason*, and especially of the *Liberty* of our *Wills*: And yet we certainly find all these *Faculties* in our selves, though we cannot either comprehend or explain the particular manner in which the several *Operations* of them are performed.

And if we cannot comprehend the manner of those *Operations* which we plainly perceive and feel to be in our *Selves*, much less can we expect to comprehend things without us; and least of all can we pretend to comprehend the infinite *Nature* and *Perfections* of *God*, and every thing belonging to Him. For *God* himself is certainly the greatest *Mystery* of all other, and acknowledged by Mankind to be in his Na-

ture, and in the particular manner of his Existence, incomprehensible by Human Understanding. And the reason of this is very evident, because God is infinite, and our knowledge and understanding is but finite: And yet no sober man ever thought this a good reason to call the Being of God in question.

The same may be said of God's certain knowledge of future Con-  
tingencies which depend upon the uncertain Wills of free Agents: It being utterly inconceivable how any Understanding, how large and perfect soever, can certainly know beforehand that which depends upon the *free Will* of another, which is an arbitrary and uncertain Cause.

And yet the *Scripture* doth not only attribute this Foreknowledge to God, but gives us also plain Instances of Gods foretelling such things, many Ages before it happened,

pened, as could not come to pass but by the Sins of Men, in which we are sure that God can have no hand ; though nothing can happen without his permission : Such was that most memorable Event of the Death of *Christ* who, as the *Scripture* tells us, was by *wicked hands crucified and slain* ; and yet even *this* is said to have happened according to the *determinate foreknowledge of God*, and was punctually foretold by Him some hundreds of years before. Nay, the *Scripture* doth not only ascribe this power and perfection to the *Divine Knowledge*, but *natural Reason* hath been forced to acknowledge it, as we may see in some of the wisest of the *Philosophers*. And yet it would puzzle the greatest *Philosopher* that ever was, to give any tolerable account how any Knowledge whatsoever can certainly and infallibly foresee an Event through uncertain  
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and contingent Causes. All the reasonable satisfaction that can be had in this matter is this, that it is not at all unreasonable to suppose that *infinite Knowledge* may have ways of knowing things which our *finite Understandings* can by no means comprehend how they can possibly be known.

Again, there is hardly any thing more inconceivable than how a thing should be of it self, and without any Cause of its Being; and yet our Reason compels us to acknowledge this: Because we certainly see that something is, which must either have been of it self and without a Cause, or else something that we do not see must have been of it self and have made all other things: And by this reasoning we are forced to acknowledge a *Deity*, the mind of Man being able to find no rest but in the acknowledgment of  
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of one *eternal* and *wise* Mind as the *Principle* and *first Cause* of all other things; and this *Principle* is that which Mankind do by general consent call *God*. So that God hath laid a sure foundation of our acknowledgment of his Being in the Reason of our own Minds: And though it be one of the hardest things in the world to conceive how any thing can be of it self, yet necessity drives us to acknowledge it whether we will or no: And this being once granted, our Reason, being tired in trying all other ways, will for its own quiet and ease force us at last to fall in with the general apprehension and belief of Mankind concerning a *Deity*.

To give but one *Instance* more; There is the like Difficulty in conceiving *how any thing can be made out of nothing*; and yet our Reason doth oblige us to believe it: Because

cause *Matter*, which is a very *imperfect Being* and merely *passive*, must either always have been of it self; or else, by the infinite Power of a most *perfect and active Being*, must have been made out of nothing: Which is much more credible, than that any thing so *imperfect* as *Matter* is should be of it self: Because that which is of it self cannot be conceived to have any bounds and limits of its *Being* and *Perfection*; for by the same reason that it necessarily is and of it self, it must necessarily have all perfection, which it is certain *Matter* hath not; and yet *necessary Existence* is so great a *Perfection*, that we cannot reasonably suppose any thing that hath this *Perfection* to want any other.

Thus you see, by these *Instances*, that it is not repugnant to Reason to believe a great many things to be, of the manner of whose *Existence*

stence we are not able to give a particular and distinct account. And much less is it repugnant to Reason to believe those things concerning God which we are very well assured he hath declared concerning Himself, though these things by our Reason should be incomprehensible.

And this is truly the Case as to the matter now under debate : We are sufficiently assured that the *Scriptures* are a *Divine Revelation*, and that this *Mystery* of the *Trinity* is therein declared to us. Now that we cannot comprehend it, is no sufficient Reason not to believe it : For if this were a good Reason for not believing it, then no man ought to believe that there is a God, because his Nature is most certainly incomprehensible. But we are assured by many Arguments that there is a God; and the same *natural Reason* which assures us  
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that *He is*, doth likewise assure us that *He is incomprehensible*; and therefore our believing Him to be so doth by no means overthrow our belief of His Being.

In like manner, we are assured by *Divine Revelation* of the truth of this Doctrine of the *Trinity*; and being once assured of *that*, our not being able fully to comprehend it is not reason enough to stagger our belief of it. A man cannot deny what he sees, though the necessary consequence of admitting it may be something which he cannot comprehend. One cannot deny the Frame of this World which he sees with his eyes, though from thence it will necessarily follow that either *that* or something else must be of it self; which yet, as I said before, is a thing which no man can comprehend how it can be.

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And by the same Reason a man must not deny what God says, to be true ; though he cannot comprehend many things which God says : As particularly concerning this *Mystery of the Trinity* It ought then to satisfy us that there is sufficient evidence that this Doctrine is delivered in *Scripture*, and that what is there declared concerning it doth not imply a Contradiction. For why should our finite understandings pretend to comprehend that which is infinite, or to know all the real *Differences* that are consistent with the Unity of an Infinite Being ; or to be able fully to explain this *Mystery* by any similitude or resemblance taken from *finite Beings* ?

But before I leave this Argument, I cannot but take notice of one thing which they of the *Church of Rome* are perpetually objecting to us upon this Occasion. And it is this, That by  
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the same reason that we believe the Doctrine of the *Trinity*, we may and must receive that of *Transubstantiation*. God forbid : Because of all the *Doctrines* that ever were in any Religion, this of *Transubstantiation* is certainly the most abominably absurd.

However, this *Objection* plainly shews how fondly and obstinately they are addicted to their own Errors, how mishapen and monstrous soever ; insomuch that rather than the Dictates of their Church, how absurd soever, should be called in question they will question the truth even of *Christianity* it self ; and if we will not take in *Transubstantiation*, and admit it to be a *necessary Article* of the *Christian Faith*, they grow so fullen and desperate that they matter not what becomes of all the rest : And rather than not have their Will of us in that which is *controverted*,  
they

the thing, and do only differ in the phrase and manner of expression: Which is to seek a quarrel and an occasion of difference where there is no real ground for it; a thing which ought to be very far from reasonable and peaceable Minds.

For the *Socinians* say, that our *Saviour's* voluntary Obedience and Sufferings did procure his Exaltation at the right hand of God, and Power and Authority to forgive Sins, and to give eternal Life to as many as he pleased: So that they grant that his Obedience and Sufferings, in the meritorious consequence of them, do redound to our *Benefit* and advantage as much as we pretend and say they do; only they are loth in exprefs terms to acknowledge that *Christ* dyed in our *Stead*: And this, for no other reason that I can imagine, but because they have denied it so often and so long.

But I appeal to the ingenuity of our *Adversaries*, whether this do not in the last issue come all to one; and be not,

on their part, a mere Controversie about words? For suppose a Malefactor condemned to some grievous punishment, and the King's Son to save him from it is contented to submit to great disgrace and sufferings: In reward of which Sufferings the King takes his Son into his Throne and sets him at his own right hand, and gives him power to pardon this Malefactor, and upon a fitting Submission and Repentance to advance him to honour: Will not any man in this Case allow that the King's Son suffer'd instead of this Malefactor, and smile at any man that shall be so nice as to grant that indeed he *suffered* for him, but yet to deny that he was *punish'd* for him, to allow that he bore the inconvenience of his faults, but yet obstinately to stand it out that the faults of this Malefactor were not laid upon him, or in any wise so imputed to him that he can be said to have suffered in his stead? This is just the Case, and the difference in reallity and in the last  
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result of things is nothing but words.

Thus far have I tryed your patience in a contentious Argument ; in which I take no pleasure, but yet shall be glad if I may be so happy as by any thing that hath been said to contribute towards the putting an end to so unhappy a Controversy, which hath troubled the World so long, and raised such a dust that very few have been able to see clearly through it.

However I cannot dismiss this Argument without making some useful but very short reflection upon this great Doctrine of our Religion, namely, That the Son of God being made a Sacrifice for us, and exposed to such bitter Sufferings and so cruel a Death for the Expiation of our Sins, should create in us the greatest dread and detestation of Sin, and for ever deter us from all wilful transgression and disobedience. For if the guilt of our Sins was done away upon such hard terms

and cost the dearly beloved Son of God so much sweat and blood, then surely we ought to take great heed how by our renewed Provocations we renew his Passion, and do what in us lies to *crucify to our selves the Son of God afresh, and to put him to an open shame.*

If God did so terribly afflict the dearly beloved of his Soul for our sakes ; if the Son of God was so grievously *wounded for our transgressions* and so sorely *bruised for our iniquities* : If so fearful a Storm of Vengeance fell upon the most innocent Person that ever was for our Sins, then we have reason to take that kind and merciful admonition of the Son of God to Sinners, to *sin no more, lest a worse thing, if it be possible, come upon our selves.*

In this Dispensation of God's Grace and Mercy to Mankind, by the Death of his Son, God seems to have gone to the very extremity of things, and almost further than Goodness and Justice will  
well

well admit ; to afflict Innocency it self to save the Guilty : And if herein God hath expressed his hatred of Sin in such a wonderful way of love and kindness to the Sons of Men as looks almost like hatred of Innocency and his own Son : This ought in all ingenuity and gratitude to our gracious Redeemer, who *was made a curse for us*, and *loved us* to that degree as to *wash us from our Sins in his own Blood* ; I say, This ought to beget in us a greater displeasure against Sin, and a more perfect detestation of it, than if we had suffered the punishment due to it, in our own Persons : For in this Case, we could only have been displeased at our Selves and our Sins as the just Cause of our Sufferings ; but in the other, we ought to hate Sin as the unhappy Occasion of the saddest Misfortune and sorest Calamities to the *best Man* that ever was, and to our *best Friend*, for our Sins and for our Sakes.

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Since then the *Son of God* hath so graciously condescended to be *made in all things* like unto us, *Sin only excepted*; let us aspire as much as is possible, to become like to Him: Above all, let us hate and avoid Sin as the only thing in which the Son of God would have no part with us, though he was contented to suffer such bitter things to save us from the Defilement and Dominion of it, from the Punishment and all the dismal consequences of it.

*He had no Sin*, but God was pleased to lay upon him the iniquities of us all, and to make his Soul an offering for Sin, and to permit all that to be done to Him which was due to us: He was contented to be sacrificed once for all Mankind, that Men might for ever cease from that inhuman and ineffectual way of sacrificing one another, whereby instead of *expiating* their guilt they did inflame it, and by thinking to make Atonement for their Sins they did in truth add to the number and heinousness of them.

And

And let us likewise learn from this admirable Pattern, to pity those that are in misery, as *Christ* also hath pitied us; and to *save them that are ready to perish*, for His sake who came to seek and to save us that were lost.

Let us, upon all occasions, be ready to open our bowels of Compassion towards the Poor; in a thankful imitation of his Grace and Goodness who for our sakes chose to be a Beggar, that we for his sake might not despise the Poor, but might have a tender regard and compassion to those whose Condition in this World does so nearly resemble that in which the *Son of God* thought it fittest for him to appear when he was pleased to become *Man*.

In a word, Let us in the whole course, and in all the actions of our lives, *shew forth the Vertues of Him who hath called us out of darkness into his marvellous light; and hath raised up a mighty Salvation for us, that being delivered from all our spiritual Enemies, from*  
Sin

Sin and all the Powers of darkness, we might serve him who hath saved us; walking in holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our lives.

Now, to him that sitteth upon the Throne, and to the Lamb that was slain: To God even our Father, and to our Lord Jesus Christ, the first begotten from the dead, and the Prince of the Kings of the Earth: Unto Him, who hath loved us, and washed from our Sins in his own Blood; and whilst we were Enemies to Him, loved us at such a rate as never any man did his Friend. To Him, who became Man, that he might bring us to God; and assumed our frail and mortal Nature, that he might cloath us with Immortality and Life: To Him, who was pleased to dwell and live amongst us, that He might teach us how to live: To Him, who dyed for our Sins, and rose again for our Justification, and lives for ever to make Intercession for us: To Him be Glory and Dominion, Thanksgiving and Praise to Eternal Ages. Amen.

F I N I S.

